

**CRW 1101: BEGINNING FICTION WRITING**  
**Spring 2015 • Section 6754 • T9-11, TUR2333**

**Instructor:** Colin B. Williams (cbwilliams@ufl.edu)  
**Office Hours:** T2-4pm and by appointment in TUR4341

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Welcome to Beginning Fiction Writing. In this course, we will be looking at a variety of techniques used in fiction – this will not only prepare you to write compelling stories but also to refine your use of the English language. We will not only be working on fiction itself, but also on critical texts; since reading is one of the most essential skills needed in writing, the course will also involve several (short) critical responses to the stories we examine during our workshop. At the very least, this course will teach you basic writing and critical thinking skills as well as meeting the Gordon Rule word count.

Fiction is a loose term. For the purposes of this course, we can understand fiction to correspond to the concept of storytelling. Exposure to and analysis of fictional texts will help expand on this idea by allowing us to take apart and examine the inner workings of successful stories. Topics covered will include plot, character, chronology, dialogue, conflict and perspective. The stories covered will include works by contemporary authors as well as authors whose time has come and gone. By the time this course is over, students will learn how to express a wide spectrum of emotions, choose their words selectively, revise and refine their work and critically respond to both published authors and their peers in the classroom.

*Skill alone cannot teach or produce a great short story, which condenses the obsession of the creature; it is a hallucinatory presence manifest from the first sentence to fascinate the reader, to make him lose contact with the dull reality that surrounds him, submerging him in another that is more intense and compelling.*

*- Julio Cortázar*

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### **Course Policies and Requirements**

#### ***Required Texts***

- *Making Shapely Fiction* by Jerome Stern (Norton)
- Stories on Ares Course Reserves in PDF format

The instructor will furnish other texts as PDFs or handouts as needed.

#### ***Recommended Texts***

- *The Brief Penguin Handbook* (Penguin)
- A collection of short stories from the list on p. 7 of this syllabus

- Any other collection containing one or more of the stories to be read

### *Assignments and Grading*

For this course, you will be required to write the following:

- **Ten 500-word short reading responses** that examine each story with the help of the critical reading. Responses must be submitted to Canvas by midnight the night before the stories analyzed in the response are discussed in class;
- **One 1000-word critical paper** on a collection of short stories **not** assigned as part of the course, which may be chosen from the list found at the back of the syllabus;
- **Three 500- to 750-word flash fiction pieces** which will be started in class based on prompts derived from the assigned texts;
- **One revised 500- to 1000-word flash fiction piece** to be submitted from the above three;
- **One 1000- to 1500-word short story** to be written outside of class and workshopped during a class session later in the semester;
- **A revised and improved copy of the above story** to be submitted with a **500-word letter** detailing the changes made in conjunction with the previously assigned critical texts.

The course will also involve a number of shorter in-class exercises, analytical exercises related to the assigned works of fiction and ample discussion of each work as time permits. Full details, requirements and rubrics for each assignment will be posted on Canvas under “Assignments.”

The grading for this course will break down as follows:

Assignment	Points and Percentage
Short Reading Responses	300 (30 points each) (30%)
Reading Response to Collection	150 (15%)
Flash Fiction (graded for completion)	150 (50 points each) (15%)
Revised Flash Fiction (graded for quality)	100 (10%)
Short Story for Workshop (graded for completion)	100 (10%)
Short Story Revision & Letter (graded for quality)	200 (20%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1000 (100%)</b>

There will not be opportunities for extra credit on assignments, but **you may earn ten credit points by attending the MFA@FLA Readings** during the semester (they will be held on Thursdays, dates TBD). You may not earn more than twenty total extra credit points.

As in art, technical mastery consists not only of innovative content but also of technical mastery and attention to detail. Picasso had to learn how to draw a realistic human form before deconstructing one, after all.

Therefore, flash fiction and stories submitted will be **graded for completion** as noted, meaning they will be assessed on whether or not they meet the following guidelines:

1. The submitted assignment meets the required word count ( $\geq 500$  words for flash fiction,  $\geq 1000$  words for short story);
2. The assignment contains no objective and egregious misspellings or punctuation errors;
3. The assignment includes the proper heading (name, course number, instructor, date and word count);
4. The assignment is double-spaced, written in an acceptable font and otherwise correctly formatted including proper margin size and paragraph indentation;
5. The pages are numbered in the header with the student's last name included;
6. The submission has a title, centered at the top of the first page;
7. The submission is handed in on time and submitted in printed form to the class a week prior to workshop.

Revisions will be **graded for quality**, which means that they should fulfill the above requirements **and** demonstrate effective writing. What this means may differ story to story, but the general requirements are that the story be original work that demonstrates effective use of point of view, verb tense/temporal logic, setting, sensory detail and dramatic tension. Revised stories should exhibit clear differences from submitted first drafts. A rubric will be provided.

Work that is graded for quality – that is, all work except for stories submitted to the workshop – must meet a certain level of quality. Students can reasonably expect the following grades based on the quality of work received:

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|-----------------------|---|
| <b>A (excellent)</b>  | Work submitted exceeds all requirements in refinement, quality and insightfulness. The assignment takes risks that pay off, is correctly formatted and is free of distracting errors. |
| <b>B (good)</b>       | Work submitted meets all requirements and shows the beginnings of insight. The assignment takes risks that may or may not pay off and is largely free of errors.                      |
| <b>C (acceptable)</b> | Work submitted meets most requirements but takes few risks or is laden with summary/shallow analysis. The assignment takes few risks and/or contains distracting errors.              |

**D (poor)** Work submitted does not meet most requirements of the assignments and/or takes few risks and/or is full of distracting errors and/or is careless in execution.

**E (unacceptable)** Work fails to meet even basic requirements and shows an egregious lack of creativity, insight and carefulness. Work containing plagiarism will not receive any points and may result in further disciplinary action.

The grading scale used for this course is as follows:

A	4.0	930-1000 (out of 1000)	C	2.0	730-769
A-	3.67	900-929	C-	1.67	700-729
B+	3.33	870-899	D+	1.33	670-699
B	3.0	830-869	D	1.0	630-669
B-	2.67	800-829	D-	0.67	600-629
C+	2.33	770-799	E	0.0	0-599

Final grades may be appealed by contacting Carla Blount in the English Department.

### *Attendance and Expectations*

This course is organized in a three-hour block in order to maximize the amount of time we have to discuss, critique, read and analyze. Because of this, you will be expected to arrive on time and to limit your total absences to **two missed courses maximum** (six course hours). Students missing more courses than this will not pass unless the circumstances surrounding the absences are extenuating (e.g., religious holidays, a family emergency, extreme illness, etc.). Please discuss extenuating circumstances with the instructor before any absence.

Anyone more than ten minutes late to class will be counted **tardy**, and three tardies will count as an absence. Attendance on the day on which your flash fiction/story is to be workshopped is mandatory.

### *Course Materials and Electronics Policy*

Students must bring either an electronic or paper copy of the story to be discussed. During workshop, students should bring paper or electronic copies of all stories to be workshopped. Students attending without course materials may be counted as absent.

Because the course's required texts are largely provided in a PDF format, **students may bring laptops** in order to access these texts. Students should avoid distractions such as texting and social media during classtime. Distracted students will be called on or given a warning during class. Repeated infractions may result in dismissal (and therefore an unplanned absence).

### *Workshop*

In order to ensure that everyone has time to read the flash fiction/stories that are due for workshop, students who are due to be workshopped must bring in printed copies of their completed stories **and** submit their story electronically via the course eLearning (Canvas) page **the week prior to workshop**. Failure to do so will result in a deduction of a letter grade on said assignment. Students struggling with writer's block should use a prompt or contact the instructor.

Students should read each submitted story twice and make marginal notes or comments to suggest grammatical, syntactical or punctuational changes. Detailed feedback for overarching issues such as plot, character or theme should be addressed in a **brief note or letter**, which should contain at least three comments on what was effective and three comments on what could be improved. Letters may be handwritten or typed and included with each draft.

Everyone in workshop is expected to help ensure that, for the three hours of the course, everyone feels comfortable, safe and willing to share his or her writing. Writing can be very personal – much of the best fiction draws to some extent on the author's own experiences – and some students are not as comfortable sharing their writing as others. For this reason, all students should be careful to avoid bigotry, insensitivity, insults and derision. A successful workshop should be a critical environment but not a hostile one. If a student personally offends other students, he or she may be asked to leave, which could result in an unplanned absence.

### *Course Credit and Academic Honesty*

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing (Gordon Rule). For questions about meeting course requirements, see the course catalog or contact the Registrar's Office.

All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. Plagiarism is a very serious offence and may result in a zero for an assignment, failure of the course and/or a referral to the Dean of Students' Office. If you copy some or all of your work from any source without citation – including your work in past courses – you are committing plagiarism. Plagiarism is relatively easy to check and consequences will be immediate.

For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php> and/or consult with the instructor.

### *Sexual Harassment*

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. As mentioned in the section on attendance, hateful or discriminatory language will under no circumstances be tolerated. Anyone found harassing or degrading course participants will be subject to expulsion from the class, a referral

to the Dean of Students and/or other disciplinary action. Students should immediately report any intimidating or harassing behavior.

For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/>

### *Students with Disabilities*

Every effort will be made to accommodate students with disabilities or other special needs. Students who meet this description should contact the instructor and/or the Dean of Students prior to the course's first meeting so that any arrangements can be made.

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

## Course Meeting and Reading Schedule

- 1/6 Introduction to course and syllabus:** Explanation of course policy, required readings  
*Reading: Ch. 1-3 in Stern, Chekhov in course reserves*
- 1/13 The Five W's:** Effective beginnings, hooking the reader, establishing voice, Chekhov  
*Reading: Ch. 4-5 in Stern, Varma, García Márquez, Colette and Oates in course reserves*
- 1/20 Show and Tell:** Persuasive description, sensory detail, creating 3D characters, density of detail, **first flash fiction**  
*HW: Finish first flash*  
*Reading: Ch. 6-7 in Stern, Cisneros in course reserves*
- 1/27 Points of View:** Choosing the right perspective, building your characters, raising the stakes, **second flash fiction**  
*Due: First flash fiction*  
*Reading: Ch. 8-10 in Stern, Atwood in course reserves*  
*HW: Finish second flash*
- 2/3 Beginning the Ending:** Understanding conflict and tension, using charged language, economy of words, self-prompting, **third flash fiction**  
*Due: second flash fiction*  
*Reading: Stern Ch. 11-16 Leavitt in course reserves*  
*HW: choose collection for critical paper*
- 2/10 Not Quite Love:** Writing realistic relationships, avoiding tropes and clichés

**Due: Third flash fiction, collection choice for critical paper**

*Reading: Stern Ch. 11-16, Walker in course reserves*

**2/17 Writing Socially:** Economic context, food and ritual in writing, avoiding eye dialect  
*HW: finish reading response to collection*

**2/24 Proper Revision:** Giving proper feedback, using respectful critical language  
**Due: Critical paper**

*Reading: Borges in course reserves*

*HW: Revise flash for submission, due by midnight on 2/28 on Canvas*

**3/3 No class (spring break)**

**3/10 Weirdness:** Surreality, high-concept writing, breaking the rules  
**Workshop flash fiction round 1**

**Due: Flash fiction revision (rounds 2 & 3 submitters)**

*Reading: Byatt in course pack*

**3/17 Ars Poetica:** Art in fiction, working within a context, epigraphs  
**Workshop flash fiction round 2**

*Reading: Murakami in course reserves*

**3/24 Imitation and Thievery:** Channeling your influences, “meta-,” referencing pop culture  
**Workshop flash fiction round 3**

*Reading: Joyce in course reserves*

*HW: Begin work on stories*

**3/31 The Complete Story:** Expansiveness, plotting for the long haul, history in fiction  
**Due: stories round 1**

**4/7 Workshop stories round 1**  
**Due: stories round 2**

**4/14 Workshop stories round 2**  
**Due: stories round 3**

**4/21 Workshop stories round 3**

**4/28 No class (finals):** Story revision evals, return of second reading responses, summer vacation!  
**Due: Story Revision & Letter (turn in to instructor’s office by noon)**

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### Timeline of Workshop and Paper Due Dates

	1/27	2/3	2/10	2/24	3/10	3/17	3/24	3/31	4/7	4/14	4/21	4/28
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Due (paper & Canvas)	FF1	FF2	FF3	Critical Paper, FFR*	-	-	-	S1	S2	S3		Story Revision & Letter
Workshop (feedback due)	-	-	-	-	FFR1	FFR2	FFR3	-	S1	S2	S3	-

**FF# = Flash Fiction** (worked on in class; turned in for completion)

**FFR# = Flash Fiction Revision** (revised at home over break, responded to in class)

**RR (S) = Reading Response (Story)**

**RR (C) = Reading Response (Collection)**

**S# = Story** (completed at home and submitted in advance, responded to in class)

\*Flash fiction revisions will be due on 2/28.

### Collections for Critical Paper (Choose One)

Franz Kafka – *Metamorphosis and Other Stories* (trans. Michael Hofmann)

Junot Díaz – *Drown*

Grace Paley – *The Little Disturbances of Man*

Alice Munro – *Alice Munro's Best (Selected Stories)*

Raymond Carver – *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*